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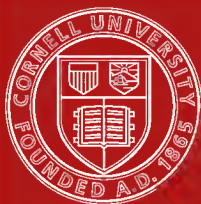
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The profit from the sale of the Sermon will be applied to  
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**Olney Cowper Memorial Church Building Fund.**

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A PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT  
OF THE  
DIVINE COUNSEL AND CONDUCT,  
ATTEMPTED IN A  
**S E R M O N,**  
OCCASIONED BY THE DECEASE OF  
**WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ. ;**  
PREACHED AT OLNEY,  
18 MAY, 1800,  
By **SAMUEL GREATHEED.**

---

Who is there among you that feareth Jehovah ?  
Let him hearken unto the voice of his servant ;  
That walketh in darkness, and hath no light ?  
Let him trust in the name of Jehovah ;  
And rest himself on the support of his God.

LOWTH'S ISAIAH, L. 10.

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PUBLISHED BY GENERAL REQUEST.

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**Olney :**

HENRY JACKSON, GENERAL PRINTER.

—  
MDCCLXXIX.



TO  
LADY HESKETH,  
THE ENDEARED RELATIVE,  
THE FRIEND THROUGHOUT LIFE,  
AND THE AFFLICTED EXECUTRIX,  
OF THE LATE MR. COWPER;  
TO WHOSE CONSOLATION,  
AMIDST THE DISTRESSES OF HIS LATER YEARS,  
HER ATTENTION, EXERTIONS, AND SACRIFICES,  
PRINCIPALLY CONTRIBUTED;  
THE FOLLOWING TRIBUTE  
OF JUSTICE AND AFFECTION  
TO HIS MEMORY,  
IS WITH HER PERMISSION INSCRIBED,  
AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE SINCEREST RESPECT,  
AND THE MOST CORDIAL ESTEEM,  
BY HER LADYSHIP'S OBLIGED SERVANT,  
THE AUTHOR.

## ADVERTISEMENT.

The ensuing discourse was addressed to the inhabitants of Olney (without distinction of religious persuasions) from the pulpit of the Rev. Thomas Hillyard, Pastor of the Independent Congregation; whose place the Author had been engaged, previously to the appointment of the Subject, to supply at the time when it was preached. Excepting a few observations of general import, which have been added, it resembles as nearly what was then delivered, as the recollection of a discourse spoken extempore and at very short notice, can admit.

The letter annexed, which was signed by thirty of the principal people, suffices to explain the motives of publication, and affords a pleasing specimen of the great and general estimation in which the late Mr. Cowper was held by his neighbours.

“ Rev. Sir,

We the undersigned inhabitants of Olney, who were present at the delivery of your discourse on the death of our late worthy and highly esteemed neighbour Mr. Cowper, beg leave to offer you our best thanks for the account you gave of his very singular experience; an account which was not only peculiarly interesting to us (many of whom were personally acquainted with him) but to a neighbourhood in general, where he was so well known and universally beloved and honoured.

We have moreover to make known our most serious and earnest request that you will consent to the printing of the sermon; a favour that we flatter ourselves you will have the goodness not to refuse, from a consideration of the interest which the public at large take in everything that relates to so eminent a Character; but more especially from a view of the important service which the publication of such a discourse may, under the divine blessing, render to the Church of Christ.

To the Rev. Samuel Greatheed,  
Newport-Pagnell.”

# SERMON.

ISAIAH IV, 8. 9.

*For my thoughts (are) not your thoughts, neither (are) your ways my ways saith the Lord. For (as) the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

THE eternal Creator and governor of the universe vouchsafed to intimate, in these words particularly addressed to the Jewish nation, the vast disproportion, and consequently the frequent opposition, of divine and human counsels. It had pleased God to select the family of Abraham to be the depositories of his revealed will, until that fulness of time should come, when the glad tidings of Redemption completed by the sacrifice of the Son of God, should be published to all nations. The Hebrews had inherited this privilege twelve hundred years, when Isaiah prophesied to them. If we reflect upon the powerful influence of habit on the judgements of mankind, it will not seem strange that this people considered the knowledge of the only true God as their exclusive and unalienable property. The principal labour of the prophet Isaiah was directed to the removal of this absurd and baneful prejudice. For this purpose, he strongly urges upon their attention the important truth expressed in the words that I have read to you ; a truth, which, although it may appear self evident, has been lamentably disregarded by persons of various descriptions in every age of the world.

I wish, at this time, to impress upon your minds a consideration of the infinite superiority of the thoughts and ways of God to ours, on occasion of the decease of our late excellent neighbour and friend Mr. Cowper, who died at East Dereham in Norfolk, on the 25th day of the preceding month. Extensively as he is esteemed and admired on account of his poetical compositions, it is in *this* town and neighbourhood, where he spent nearly half his life, that he was best known, and therefore most beloved. Having been honoured with his peculiar friendship, and being at this juncture called to preach to you in the absence of your worthy Pastor, on *what* solemn subject can I so properly address you, as on an event which is certainly more interesting to us than to any other worshipping assembly of Christians ? You have therefore signified your wish that I should speak to you on this affecting subject ; and I have as little doubt of your earnest attention, as I had of your crowded attendance. May the Father of lights, the giver of every good and perfect gift, direct me how to improve to your everlasting benefit, this singular and important occasion ! I need your warmest intercession, as well as your most extensive candour, in attempting to discuss a subject which baffles my understanding while it engages my heart.

To see a person of most amiable manners, of very eminent genius, and of exemplary piety, languishing for almost half the term of mortal existence in hopeless dejection, and often in insupportable terrors, is not only afflictive to humanity, but disheartening and alarming to the sincere and experienced Christian. We are not, brethren, of those unhappy classes of society, who dispute the being, or the government of an eternal Power. We are not among those who have never received, or have rejected the word of God, that unveils eternity, and proclaims salvation through the blood of Christ to guilty and depraved creatures. We believe not only that in God we live and move and have our being, but also that the father of our spirits has immediate access to them, and works in us what is pleasing in His sight, both to will and to perform. Our dear departed friend possessed like precious faith. He felt and exemplified its sanctifying effects. Yet destitute of hope, respecting this life and that which was to come, he might naturally be thought by others, as he deemed himself, of all men the most miserable. How shall we in such an instance, vindicate the ways of God to man? Shall I conduct you into the labyrinth, without a clue to guide you through it? Or shall facts, the most interesting facts be suppressed, lest they should be abused?—By no means. Falsehood alone needs to shun the light. Wisdom is justified of all her children. The Lord's singular dealings with our deceased friend, could not be unjust to him; and they cannot be unprofitable to us, if we humbly and seriously contemplate them. No more would I scruple to declare the whole conduct of God, than his whole counsel, so far as I can learn it. But who can find out the Almighty to perfection? Our text forbids the expectation. May we feel, and may we profit by the truth it holds forth! With this view I purpose—to suggest some remarks upon the infinite difference between God's thoughts and ways and those of man;—then to apply these observations to the Lord's dealings with our deceased friend; and to close with such practical instructions as we may, and apparently ought to deduce from the subject.

First, consider the infinite difference between the thoughts and ways of God, and those of man. My *thoughts* are not your thoughts, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts than your thoughts. By the heavens is usually meant the whole creation of God beyond this terraqueous globe. The vast expanse containing not only the sun that enlightens our own and other planets but innumerable suns, on each of which it is probable some planetary system depends, affords when compared with the earth, a magnificent, yet a very imperfect illustration of the superiority of God's thoughts to ours. It is the capacity of thought, the faculty of reason, that raises us as human beings, to some resemblance of God; but while the most exalted of spiritual creatures remains at infinite distance below his Creator, we appear to occupy the lowest place in rational and immortal existence. What can we conceive of the immense difference between the thoughts of our first parents before they were degraded by sin, and the thoughts of Him who formed them from the dust of the earth! But to what a depth below *their* level, have we, as rational creatures, been plunged by

the corruption of our minds! Small is the portion of knowledge respecting past events that we can obtain by the most indefatigable research; and how small a part of the little knowledge we acquire, can we usually retain in our memories! Nothing that we see around us, or feel within us, is perfectly comprehended by us. We live, and move we know not how. Incapable of observing more than one object at a time, all others exist every moment unthought of by us. Futurity in this life, or in the world to come, is wholly impenetrable to our perceptions. On the contrary, He who in human nature was the express image of the invisible God, knows all things. The past, the present, and the future, all that ever was, that is and that shall be, at the same instant is bare, is laid open to the mind of God. If we consider merely our rank in natural being, can it be otherwise, than that the judgements and purposes we form, should be infinitely beneath those of God? Alas, that when HE condescends to make known any thought that emanates from the eternal mind, *we* should presume to sit in judgement on the revelation he vouchsafes, nay even to cavil at, oppose and reject his declaration! What have we to do, but humbly, and with reverence, to examine into the evidence of divine revelation; to adore the grace that imparts to us the thoughts of God; make his precepts our invariable rule of conduct, his promises our only ground of hope; and firmly to rely on divine truth, in cases where its consistency, or accomplishment exceeds the standard of our weak and corrupt understandings?

The word of divine inspiration asserts that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; that his thoughts are only evil, and that continually. It is not therefore strange that our carnal minds receive not the things of the Spirit of God, nor can know them because they are spiritually discerned. Till the mind of man is renewed after the image of God in wisdom and knowledge, it may be said of all, as it was of the enemies of Zion, "They know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel." Happy is it for us, if we have become fools, that we may be wise: if convinced of our folly and guilt, we have received Christ, as "of God made unto us wisdom and righteousness!" Whosoever trusteth in him shall not be confounded. On this foundation we are safe, to however narrow a sphere our religious perceptions may be confined, and however confused they may be on subjects of dispute among religious people. Our disputes indeed seem, in many respects, to arise from our forgetfulness that the thoughts of God are not our thoughts, though they are clothed in our words. How inadequate must be our lisping and stammering accents to express the eternal mind! If when we would make brute animals understand us, we must imitate their instinctive notes, and often assume appearances of irrational anger to enforce their obedience, how much more must the Holy Spirit stoop, when he speaks after the manner of men! "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts than your thoughts, saith the Lord."

The infinite superiority of the thoughts of God requires that *his* ways should not be *our* ways. The conduct of one man differs from that of another in proportion to the enlargement of his views. But

feeble as the human mind is in its best estate, and blinded as the wisest are by the effects of sin, our ways remain at infinite distance from the ways of God, and are often in direct opposition to them. God gave his law to our first parents: but they listened to the tempter and were seduced into transgression. God revealed a deliverer, and required faith in him as the future sacrifice for sin; but man neglected or grossly perverted the appointed sacrifices. From time to time God renewed to individuals the revelation of his commands, his promises, and his threatenings, but men were deaf to warnings and blind to examples; they became wholly corrupted and were destroyed by the Flood. From *one* family God raised a nation, to whom he gave written laws, and express promises that the Messiah should be manifested among them: but the conduct of the Jews was an almost uninterrupted course of provocation; and when the Messiah came they rejected and crucified him. The Gospel, of which they proved themselves so unworthy, was then preached to mankind at large: but its preachers were persecuted, and no sooner were its doctrines generally admitted than they were shamefully corrupted, and their holy tendency almost wholly frustrated. The Lord raised up instruments for the recovery of his revealed word from that oblivion in which it had been involved by superstition; and blessed be God! we still enjoy some happy effects of the Reformation. Many run to and fro, and knowledge is increased. But alas! the contrariety of the ways of men to those of God cannot be denied, while so great a part of the habitable earth remains in heathenish idolatry, and so much of the rest in Mahometanism, Popery and Judaism; while a great majority of them who have the scriptures set forth to them remain ignorant, abandoned, or merely moral and pharisaical; and while they who hear and profess to believe the Gospel bring forth fruits ill suited to repentance and everlasting life. In this town, where the truth as it is in Christ, has for so many years been preached with purity and zeal, to each of the three religious denominations among you; what awful proofs remain, that an infinite difference, a dreadful contrast subsists between the ways of God and the ways of man!

But I trust that I am addressing many, to whom the preaching of the Cross is the power of God unto Salvation. Some of you were wicked and unrighteous; but, through the rich and sovereign grace of God, you have been enabled to forsake your ways and thoughts, to seek the Lord while he could be found, and to call upon him while yet near. You know it to be true, that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. So far as you exercise faith in the gospel of Christ you are truly happy, in whatever circumstances you may be placed. All that you have to lament, is the deficiency of your faith. Your thoughts and your ways are in a measure brought to resemble those of God: but it is in a very imperfect measure; and hence your desires and expectations often clash with the purposes of God. In such cases learn from our text your duty, and your privilege;—to submit to the infinite wisdom of God; and to rejoice that He is leading you, though by a way you know not, towards the best attainments by

the best means. You cannot be surprised that the thoughts of God are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out, if you consider what ignorant and weak creatures we are. It is not that *they* are imperfect or inconsistent. The whole is doubtless regulated by an unerring plan that must and shall be accomplished, in the most suitable manner. Remember the vast inferiority of *your* thoughts and ways to those of God, when you are tempted to speculate upon the mode of the divine subsistence, upon the first occasion of evil, upon the fall of angels and of men, upon the mysteries included in the work of redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ, and upon the inscrutable connection between God's decrees and operations, and our own choice, conduct, and final condition. Complain not that the spirit of God has not more fully dwelt upon these subjects in his written word; when there is already recorded so much more than we are able to comprehend. Let the same rational submission be exercised with respect to the works of God, as to his word. While the Creation groans and travails together let us be resigned. If the clouds that hang over the most exalted or extended prospects on earth, involve *us* in total darkness, let us still "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon our God." There are cases in the spiritual experience of believers, that perplex the most skilful casuist; and I apprehend that the wisest minister of Christ seldom ascends the pulpit, without feeling the difficulty of adapting his instructions to the various conditions of his hearers. It pleases God to deal peculiarly with some individuals whose experience, on account of their personal eminence, is likely to become extensively known, and attentively considered. The final issue is certainly the best possible for themselves; but their unusual trials are, without doubt, also designed for the profit of many. This appears remarkably to be intimated by the singular conduct of the Lord toward our excellent neighbour deceased. Let us therefore contemplate his experience, both as a demonstration of the important truth contained in the text, and as a suitable source of instruction to ourselves. With this design I proceed,

Secondly. To apply the observations that have been made, to the Lord's dealings with our departed friend. These may be considered with regard to his outset in life;—to the early part of his religious experience;—to his long continuance in religious distress;—and to his late release from affliction and infirmity.

The entrance of our late friend upon the transient scenes of this life, apparently led to a kind of eminence very different from that to which he attained. Born of amiable and respectable parents, of noble affinity, and connected with persons of great worldly influence, his advancement and honour seemed to demand no extraordinary mental endowments. His opening genius discovered however, a capacity for elegant literature; and he enjoyed the best advantages for improvement in so pleasing a pursuit. With uncommon abilities, he possessed a most amiable temper; and he became not only the darling of his relations, but beloved and admired by his associates in education; some of whom with inferior prospects have since risen to distinguished reputa-

tion, and even to the highest professional rank. But the towering hopes that were naturally built on so flattering a ground, were undermined at an early period. From childhood, during which our late friend lost a much loved parent, his spirits were always very tender, and often greatly dejected. His natural diffidence, and depression of mind, were increased to a most distressing degree, by the turbulence of his elder companions at the most celebrated public school in the kingdom. And when at mature age he was appointed to a lucrative and honourable station in the Law, he shrunk with the greatest terror, from the appearance which it required him to make before the upper house of parliament. Several affecting circumstances concurred to increase the agony of his mind, while revolving the consequences of relinquishing the post to which he had been nominated; and he wished for madness, as the only apparent means by which his perplexity and distress could be terminated. A desperation of which few among mankind can form a suitable conception, but which it may be hoped many will regard with tender pity, drove him to attempt self-murder: and the manner of his preservation in life, or rather of his restoration to it, indicated an unusual interposition of the providence of God. His friends no longer persisted in urging him to retain his office. It was resigned; and with it his flattering prospects vanished, and his connexions with the world dissolved. A striking instance of the instability of earthly hopes, and the insufficiency of human accomplishments to promote even temporal comfort! Far other expectations had been entertained in the circle to which our late friend was at that time known; but "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

At this awful crisis, appears to have commenced Mr. Cowper's serious attention to the ways of God. Having been educated in the knowledge of the holy Scriptures, and estranged from the fool-hardy arrogance which urges unhappy youths to infidelity, he had constantly retained a reverence for the word of God. His manners were in general decent and amiable; and the course of pleasure in which he indulged himself being customary with persons in similar circumstances, he remained insensible of his state as a sinner in the sight of God, till he was brought to reflect upon the guilt of that action by which he had nearly plunged himself into endless perdition. His mind was then for the first time, convinced of the evil of sin, as a transgression of the law of God; and he was terrified by the apprehension that his late offence was unpardonable in it's nature. Instead of finding relief from reading, every book he opened, of whatever kind, seemed to him adapted to increase his distress, which became so pungent as to deprive him of his usual rest, and to render his broken slumbers equally miserable with his waking hours. While in this state he was visited by the late Rev. Martin Madan, who was related to him. By explaining from the scriptures the doctrine of original sin, Mr. Madan, convinced him that all mankind were on the same level with himself before God; the atonement and righteousness of Christ were set forth to him as the remedy which his case required; and the necessity of faith in Christ, in order to experience the blessings of this salvation, excited his earnest

desire for the attainment. His mind derived present ease from these important truths, but still inclined to the supposition that this faith was in his own power. The following day he again sunk under the horrors of perdition, and that distraction which he had sought as a refuge from the fear of man, now seized him amidst his terrors of eternal judgement. A vein of self-loathing ran through the whole of his insanity; and his faculties were so completely deranged, that the attempt which he had lately deplored as an unpardonable transgression, now appeared to him an indispensable work of piety. He therefore repeated his assault upon his own life, under the dreadful delusion that it was right to rid the earth of such a sinner; and that the sooner it was accomplished, his future misery would be the more tolerable. His purpose being again mercifully frustrated he became familiar with despair, and suffered it to be alleviated by conversation with a pious and humane physician at St Albans, under whose care he had happily been placed. He began to take some pleasure in sharing daily the domestic worship which was laudably practised by Dr. Cotton; and he found relief from his despair by reading in the Scriptures, that "God hath set forth Christ Jesus to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God," Romans iii, 25. While meditating upon this passage he obtained a clear view of the gospel, which was attended with unspeakable joy. His subsequent days were chiefly occupied with praise and prayer, and his heart overflowed with love to a crucified Redeemer. A hymn, which he wrote under these delightful impressions, will best describe the comfort that he enjoyed.

"How blest thy creature is, O God,  
 When with a single eye,  
 He views the lustre of thy word,  
 The day-spring from on high!  
 Thro' all the storms that veil the skies,  
 And frown on earthly things,  
 The Sun of Righteousness he eyes,  
 With healing in his wings.  
 Struck by that light the human heart,  
 A barren soil no more,  
 Sends the sweet smell of grace abroad,  
 Where serpents lurk'd before.  
 The soul a dreary province once  
 Of Satan's dark domain,  
 Feels a new empire formed within,  
 And owns a heavenly reign.  
 The glorious orb whose golden beams  
 The fruitful year control,  
 Since first obedient to thy word,  
 He started from the goal,  
 Has cheer'd the nations with the joys  
 His orient beams impart;  
 But Jesus! 'tis thy light alone  
 Can shine upon the heart."

The first transports of his joy which almost prevented his necessary sleep, having subsided, were followed by a sweet serenity of spirit, which he was able to retain notwithstanding reviving struggles of the corruptions with which sin has universally infected our nature. The comfort he enjoyed in the profitable conversation of his beloved physician, induced him to prolong his stay at St. Albans for twelve months after his recovery. Having determined upon renouncing his profession of the Law, he retired first to Huntingdon, and two or three years afterwards to this place, in order to indulge, amidst rural scenes, those religious pleasures and occupations, which experience had taught him to value far above all that the polite, or busy world, could afford. Another of his hymns expresses what he felt when entering on his retirement.

“ Far from the world, O Lord ! I flee,  
 From strife and tumult far ;  
 From scenes where Satan wages still  
 His most successful war.  
 The calm retreat the silent shade,  
 With prayer and praise agree ;  
 And seem by thy sweet bounty made,  
 For those who follow thee.  
 There, if thy Spirit touch the soul,  
 And grace her mean abode,  
 Oh, with what peace, and joy, and love,  
 She communes with her God !  
 There like the nightingale she pours  
 Her solitary lays ;  
 Nor asks a witness of her song.  
 Nor thirsts for human praise.  
 Author and guardian of my life,  
 Sweet source of light divine,  
 And (all harmonious names in one)  
 My SAVIOUR, thou art mine !  
 What thanks I owe thee and what love,  
 A boundless, endless store,  
 Shall echo thro’ the realms above  
 When time shall be no more.”

These two effusions of spiritual gratitude and joy, seem proper to be recommended to your attention while describing that period of his life in which they were written ; although they are well known to most of you, being inserted with sixty-six more of Mr. Cowper’s composition, among the hymns published by our venerable friend Mr. Newton, whose labours in the gospel are, and I trust ever will be gratefully remembered by you. An observation in his preface to Mr. Cowper’s poems, on the circumstances which occasioned the abode of our deceased friend in this town, is too interesting to *you* to be omitted. “ By these steps,” says he “ the good hand of God, unknown to me, was providing for me one of the principal blessings of my life ; a friend and a counsellor, in whose company for almost seven years, though we were seldom seven successive waking hours separated, I always found new pleasure. A friend who was not only a comfort to myself, but a blessing to the affectionate poor people among whom I then lived.”

Those of you who for thirty years past have lived in the fear of God can testify to the truth of the remark last quoted. Often have I heard described the amiable condescension with which our deceased friend listened to your religious converse, the sympathy with which he soothed your distresses, and the wisdom with which he imparted needful advice. At your stated meetings for prayer (would there were such in every parish!) you have heard him with benefit and delight, pour forth his heart before God in earnest intercession, with a devotion equally simple, sublime and fervent, adapted to the unusual combination of elevated genius, exquisite sensibility, and profound piety, that distinguished his mind. It was, I believe, only on such occasions as these that his constitutional diffidence was felt by him as a burden, during this happy portion of his life. I have heard him say, that when he expected to take the lead in your united prayers, his mind was greatly agitated for some hours preceding. But he observed, that his trepidation wholly subsided as soon as he began to speak in prayer; and that timidity, which he invariably felt at every appearance before his fellow creatures, gave place to an awful yet delightful consciousness of the presence of his Saviour.

His walk with God in private was consistent with the solemnity and fervour of his social engagements. Like the prophet Daniel, and the royal psalmist, he "kneeled three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God," in retirement, beside the regular practice of domestic worship. His mind was stayed upon God; and for an unusual course of years it was kept in perfect peace. The corrupt dispositions which have so strong a hold upon the human heart appeared to be peculiarly suppressed in him; and when in any degree felt, they were lamented and resisted by him. His *hymns*, mostly written during this part of his life, describe both the general tenor of his thoughts and their occasional wanderings with a force of expression dictated by the liveliness of his feelings. While his attainments in the love of God were thus eminent, you, my friends, can testify the exemplary love that he practised toward his neighbour. To a conduct void of offence toward any individual, and marked with peculiar kindness to all who feared God, was added a beneficence fully proportioned to his ability, and exercised with the greatest modesty and discretion.

The consolation which, after having endured the severest distress, he at that time derived from a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved him and gave himself for him, he thus describes in an affecting allegory.

"I was a stricken deer, that left the herd  
Long since; with many an arrow deep infixt,  
My panting side was charg'd, when I withdrew  
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.  
There was I found by one who had himself  
Been hurt by th' archers. In his side he bore,  
And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars,  
With gentle force soliciting the darts,  
He drew them forth, and heal'd and bade me live."

The Task. B. 3.

This testimony to the truth and solidity of that peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the privilege of them who are justified by faith, he published long after he had lost all enjoyment of the blessing. But who would not have hoped to see his path, like that of the sun, "shine more and more unto the perfect day"?—The degree and the duration of his spiritual comforts, had perhaps exceeded the usual experience of pious people, and some suspension of them would not have seemed surprising; but who could have expected their total and final extinction?—Without some gross provocation of the Holy Spirit, so dreadful a privation of peace and hope could hardly have been imagined; yet they who had the best capacity and advantages for judging in this case, remain the most strenuous defenders and warmest admirers of his universal deportment. Firmly as we are persuaded, that *mental* happiness, which far exceeds in value every outward comfort, descends from the Father of our spirits, we cannot observe this inestimable blessing utterly withdrawn from such a character as that just described, without calling to mind the language of the text; "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

Our departed friend conceived some presentiment of this sad reverse as it drew near; and during a solitary walk in the fields, he composed a hymn, which is so appropriate to our subject, and so expressive of that faith and hope which he retained as long as he possessed himself, that although it is very familiarly known to you, I cannot forbear to introduce it in this place.

"God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants his footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.  
Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill.  
He treasures up his bright designs,  
And works his sov'reign will.  
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning Providence  
He hides a smiling face.  
His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding ev'ry hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flow'r.  
Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan his work in vain;  
God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain."

Armed with like faith, let us contemplate the dreary path that our deceased neighbour trod so long a time. Many have visited it's gloomy entrance, and some have been a tedious while bewildered in it, but none

within my knowledge, has traced, as he did, it's whole extent. The steps, by which he descended to it, were sudden, and awfully precipitous. The bright, yet serene lustre, which had usually "marked the road that led him to the Lamb," was succeeded by impenetrable darkness. After the clearest views of the love of God, and the expansion of heart which he had enjoyed in His ways, his mind became obscured, confused, and dismayed. He concluded, as too many others have done under so sensible a change, and as the psalmist in his infirmity was tempted to do, that "the Lord had cast him off; that he would be favourable no more; that his mercy was clean gone for ever!" That vivid imagination, which often attained the utmost limits of the sphere of reason, did but too easily transgress them; and his spirits, no longer sustained upon the wings of faith and hope, sunk with their weight of natural depression, into the horrible abyss of absolute despair. In this state his mind became immoveably fixed. He cherished an unalterable persuasion that the Lord after having renewed him in holiness had doomed him to everlasting perdition. The doctrines in which he had been established directly opposed such a conclusion, and he remained still equally convinced of their *general* truth: but he supposed himself to be the only person that ever believed with the heart unto righteousness and was notwithstanding excluded from salvation. In this state of mind, with a deplorable consistency, he ceased not only from attendance upon public and domestic worship, but likewise from every attempt at private prayer; apprehending that for *him* to implore mercy would be opposing the determinate counsel of God. Amidst these dreadful temptations such was his unshaken submission to what he imagined to be the divine pleasure that he was accustomed to say "if holding up my finger would save me from endless torments, I would not do it against the will of God." It was only at seasons when racked by the immediate expectation of being plunged into everlasting misery, his mind became wholly distracted that he ever uttered a rebellious word against that God of love whom his lamentable delusion transformed into an implacable oppressor. His efforts at self-destruction were repeatedly renewed; but they were stimulated by a strong impression that God had commanded him to perpetrate this act; and he even supposed that his involuntary failure in the performance had incurred the irrevocable vengeance of the almighty! To this, and never to any other deficiency of obedience, have I heard him ascribe his imaginary exclusion from mercy.

Habituated to the fearful expectation of judgement, it became, as at the period formerly described, by degrees less insupportable. He became accessible to a few intimate friends in succession, who laboured to divert his thoughts from the dreadful object that engrossed them, and to excite them to activity on different subjects. Thus originated most of those poems which, when published, charmed and surprised both the literary and the religious world. The attempt was successful in that which interested him much more than poetical fame, his partial relief from self-torment. Sometimes his mind was led so far from the vortex of distress as to indulge in playful essays; but these intervals

were extremely transient. In general his poems are the evident dictates of that reverence for God, that esteem for the Gospel, and that benevolence toward fellow creatures which characterised his familiar conversation. Sometimes his thoughts in composition glanced upon the subject he designed to avoid; and nothing can afford a more striking picture of himself than the following lines in his poem on retirement:

“Look where he comes—in this embower’d alcove  
Stand close conceal’d, and see a statue move:  
Lips busy, and eyes fix’d, foot falling slow,  
Arms hanging idly down, hands clasp’d below,  
Interpret to the marking eye distress,  
Such as its *symptoms* can alone express.  
That tongue is silent now; that silent tongue  
Could argue once, could jest or join the song,  
Could give advice, could censure or commend,  
Or charm the sorrows of a drooping friend.  
Renounc’d alike its office and its sport,  
Its brisker and its graver strains fall short;  
Both fail beneath a fevers secret sway,  
And, like a summer brook, are past away.  
This is a sight for pity to peruse,  
Till she resemble faintly what she views,  
Till sympathy contract a kindred pain,  
Pierc’d with the woes that she laments in vain.”

The connection of this passage is highly beautiful, but it is too large for quotation. It closes with advice to the pitiable sufferer (which alas! our deceased friend could not himself exemplify) to seek the favour of God, as the only balm for a wounded spirit. At times indeed, after more than twelve years of uninterrupted despair, some transient changes of his mental sensations admitted a gleam of hope, of which he immediately availed himself for a renewal of intercourse with God. He prayed in private as before his affliction, and even his slumbers were thus delightfully occupied. He has spoken of such nights compared with those he usually endured, as passed on a bed of rose-leaves instead of fiery tortures, and as a transition from hell to heaven. These lucid intervals were unhappily so short that he never resumed his attendance on public worship. The most tolerable days that he spent in the customary state of his mind, he has described to me, as begun with traces of horror, left by the most frightful dreams. The forenoon being employed in composition became gradually less distressing. Before dinner he usually walked two hours; and the air, the rural prospects, and muscular exercise, contributed to his further relief. If at dinner, and during the afternoon, he had the company of an intimate friend or two, which was frequently the case during the last ten years that he lived in this neighbourhood, their conversation seemed to afford the principal alleviation to his habitual burden. The evening was commonly employed in reading aloud to some friend who resided with him; for such was the care of God over this amiable sufferer, that he never was left without some companion, whose heart the Lord disposed to sacrifice every comfort for his preservation and relief. But as night approached his gloom of mind regularly increased; and when he went

to his bed it was not to rest but to be again harrassed in slumber with the terrifying images of a bewildered fancy, neither restrained by the control of reason nor diverted by external objects.

Of the general condition of his mind during the last seven years of his abode in this vicinity, which certainly were the most tranquil that he passed in the latter part of his life, the best judgement may be formed from his own expressions in a poem written towards the close of that interval. It was occasioned by the unexpected acquisition of a small portrait of his mother, whom he had lost more than half a century before, but had never ceased to remember with the warmest gratitude and the fondest affection. Having described hers and his father's passage through this life to a heavenly world, under the figure of a voyage speedily and prosperously terminated, he naturally reverts in the same metaphorical language to the distressing contrast which his own situation and prospects presented.

" But me, scarce hoping to attain that rest,  
Always from port withheld, always distress'd—  
Me howling winds drive devious, tempest-toss'd,  
Sails ript, seams op'ning wide, and compass lost;  
And day by day, some currents thwarting force  
Sets me more distant from a prosp'rous course.  
But oh the thought, that thou art safe, and he!  
That thought is joy, arrive what may to me."

The principal pleasure that our excellent neighbour appeared to be capable of receiving was indeed that which he derived from the happiness of others. Instead of being provoked to discontent and envy by contrasting their comforts with his own afflictions, there evidently was not a benefit that he knew to be enjoyed by others which did not afford him sensible satisfaction, not a suffering they endured which did not add to his pain. To the happiness of them who were privileged with opportunities of showing their esteem for him he was most tenderly alive. The advancement of the knowledge of Christ in the world at large was always near his heart, and whatever concerned the general welfare of mankind was interesting to him, secluded as he was from the public and in common from religious society. In like manner from his distant retreat he viewed with painful sensations the progress of infidelity and of sin in every shape. His love to God, though unassisted by a hope of divine favour, was invariably manifested by an abhorrence of every thing that he thought dishonourable to the Most-high, and a delight in all that tended to His glory.

His sympathizing and admiring friends were fondly cherishing a hope that the diminution of his sufferings, which was apparent for several successive years, would at length result in his restoration to spiritual peace and joy. Although advanced in years, his health, by means of regular exercise and additional society, was not only preserved but seemed to improve, notwithstanding the root of his bitterness evidently still remained. Amidst flattering expectations the Lord permitted some affecting events to revive his distress in all its force,

and to plunge him again into distraction and desperation. He declined all mental or bodily exertion and rejected all attempts at friendly consolation; nay he conceived his tenderest friends to be transformed by the powers of darkness into conspirators against his welfare. Expecting every hour to be his last out of endless torments, nothing short of this horrible prospect could attract his notice for an instant. He refused day after day his necessary food; and imminent danger appeared of his speedy departure out of life, in so dreadful a state of mind. But the Lord, who had dashed the rising hopes of his friends, now mercifully disappointed their fears. His period of mortality was extended; and means were unexpectedly afforded for his removal from this neighbourhood to a distant situation, where he could remain under the continual care of an amiable young kinsman, who, with a tenderness beyond the common limits of filial affection, watched over the precious remnant of his life. Much of it elapsed without a probability of his restoration to the state from which he had *last* fallen. His intellectual powers were so much affected by this relapse that he was only capable of attending to the most trivial subjects, even when willing to have his thoughts diverted from despair. Local advantages, the solicitous attention of affectionate friends, and the indefatigable assiduity of his only remaining companion, were at length rendered so far useful that he was enabled to resume his literary occupations, which were always when pursued a considerable though partial alleviation of his distress.

Here let us pause, and look back upon the long, long period during which he may be said to have "walked in darkness, and so have seen no light." Is it more astonishing that the Lord, whom he had so eminently known and loved and served, and whose honour he was so admirably qualified to promote, should leave him to sufferings so peculiarly severe; or that through such an extent of time he should continually preserve him, though destitute of hope and peace, from natural or violent dissolution? To me the most surprising circumstance is that without encouragement to seek for divine protection and help, he should still have been kept from *sin*; and that although he viewed the Lord in relation to himself only as an implacable judge, he yet retained a holy reverence for his name, a jealous regard for his glory, and an unlimited submission to his will. In every view while we contemplate this "bush that burned with fire, and that was not consumed," we cannot but acknowledge that "the judgements of God are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out."

The singularity of the Lord's dealings with our deceased neighbour excited in the minds of all who knew his situation an anxious enquiry, "what will the end of these things be?"—It was universally concluded that some important object would be accomplished by so unusual a train of sufferings. Some of his intimate connections were persuaded that he would be fully restored to health and comfort of mind, and would become instrumental in the Lord's hand to "bind up the broken hearted" by publicly declaring to others what God had done for his soul. There were few who did not confidently expect, perhaps none

who did not earnestly hope, that the tedious night of sorrow would terminate previous to his departure from this life, and that his latter end would be peace and joy. All indeed, I believe without exception, who well knew this excellent man, were so fully convinced of his uprightness of heart before God, that in whatever state of mind he might close his eyes on earthly scenes, they could not doubt of his entrance into glory, through the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, which had been the only ground of his hope and was still all his desire. Yet they could not, without some degree of anxiety, look forward to the last scene of life, which his advancing age evinced to be at hand. This issue of his whole warfare has but recently been decided, and the manner of it has not as yet publicly transpired. Comparing the end with the various hopes or fears that were entertained concerning it, we shall have additional occasion to recollect that "the Lord's ways are not our ways, neither are our thoughts his thoughts."

During the last year or two of Mr. Cowper's life his health and his state of mind appeared to be as much restored as for an equal time at any period during his long afflictions. Toward the close of the past winter he was however attacked by a bodily disorder, which brought on a rapid decay. His young friend and relative, convinced that he would shortly exchange a world of infirmity and sorrow for a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, repeatedly endeavoured to cheer him with the prospect, and to assure him of the happiness that awaited him. Still he refused to be comforted. "Oh spare me! spare me! You know, you *know* it to be false" was his only reply; with the same invincible despair to which he had so long been a prey.

Early on the twenty-fifth of April he sunk into a state of apparent insensibility, which might have been mistaken for a tranquil slumber, but that his eyes remained half open. His breath was regular though feeble; and his countenance and animal frame were perfectly serene. In this state he continued for twelve hours; and then expired without heaving his breath.

In reviewing such a display of human affliction as the life of our admired friend presents to us, let us not cherish that stupid insensibility which modern scepticism has but too successfully inculcated. "Remember them who have suffered adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." To them who believe that God was manifest in the flesh by the Word, who was God, being made flesh, the condition of Humanity appears highly important and becomes peculiarly interesting. The Lord Jesus Christ, our glorious Highpriest, is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He was in all points tempted as we are, and afflicted in all our afflictions. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all consolation, doth not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men. As a father pitieth his children the Lord pitieth all who fear him." Even a mother's compassionate remembrance of the infant at her breast is represented in the holy scriptures as less certain than the Lord's remembrance of his people. Hence we may reasonably infer that the grievous and wearisome afflic-

tions endured by our deceased friend would not have been permitted but for some important, necessary, and gracious purpose of God. The Lord's ways and thoughts are superior to those of man, as they are directed to the general good, while ours are biassed by selfish and partial views ; but it is equally certain that the Judge of the whole earth will act justly toward every individual, and will not in any instance, like mankind, do evil that good may come. The Lord's conduct was doubtless just and ultimately gracious toward our afflicted neighbour, but when we consider its singularity, and the excellence and celebrity of the person thus dealt with, we may also properly conclude that by this display of his sovereignty the Lord designed to impart to us some needful instruction, or to impress more powerfully upon our minds some important truths of which, although not ignorant, we have been too forgetful. Let us therefore, seeking for wisdom from above, proceed

Thirdly, To contemplate the very remarkable dealings of God with our departed friend, as a source of profitable instruction to ourselves. Without pretending to fathom the depth of the riches of the wisdom of God in this uncommon dispensation, or to exhaust a subject of which we shall probably know more hereafter, we may certainly derive several very useful lessons, both to correct our judgement and to improve our conduct, from the solemn topic which has been discussed. That the Lord did *not* raise up Mr. Cowper from a state of infirmity and affliction, to declare by his lips or by his pen the dealings of God with his soul, may perhaps be accounted for if we reflect that being dead he speaks more than he could have done while living. The issue, which would then have remained uncertain, is now decided ; and we may speak more confidently than he could himself have done. Having learned from what is already stated to *submit* our ways and thoughts to those of God, let us now, under his blessing, endeavour to bring our own judgement and conduct to a better *resemblance* of them.

1st. We may learn in various respects to form *our judgements* more suitably to the *thoughts of God*.

There is perhaps nothing in which the judgement of God and that of man appear to be more opposite than in what regards the demerit and dreadful consequences of sin. The mind of man revolts against the calamities which exist in the world as consequences of original transgression, against the doom of everlasting misery pronounced upon every impenitent offender, and against the necessity of such a sacrifice as that of our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, in order to the justification of sinners believing in him. Mankind, forgetful of the indisputable authority, the unerring wisdom and unspeakable goodness of God, will not admit the evil of transgressing his commands to be so great as justly to incur such punishments, or indispensably to require such a propitiation. They regard as desirable whatever may gratify their natural inclinations, promote their present ease, or advance their worldly interests, whether it be allowed or prohibited by the law of

God. But the Almighty has added to his commands respecting our outward conduct, that searching precept, Thou shalt not covet ! And he has revealed his wrath against all kinds and degrees of impiety and injustice among men ; requiring on pain of everlasting perdition that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbours as ourselves. Hence the Scripture concludes all mankind under Sin, and therefore absolutely in need of Salvation. It has always been a common prejudice among men to suppose that individuals upon whom signal calamities have been inflicted must of course have been signal transgressors ; as if those offences against God's law which are either less aggravated or more customary, were too trivial to justify any considerable degree of punishment even in this world. Thus Job's companions regarded his peculiar sufferings as a proof that however fair and eminent his outward character had been, he must in secret have been a grievous offender against God. But the Lord severely reproved them, and justified his servant Job from their uncharitable censures. Our Lord Jesus fully determines this point on occasion of the remarkable calamities in which some inhabitants of Jerusalem and some Galileans who came thither to offer sacrifices were involved at the time of his ministry. "Suppose ye," said he to his disciples, "that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things ? I tell you nay ; but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt at Jerusalem ? I tell you nay ; but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." So if any of you think that because Mr. Cowper was so eminent a sufferer he must have been a sinner above all others, I tell you no ; but except *you* repent you will all perish. I have good ground to believe that *before* our deceased friend was brought to a knowledge of the Gospel, his conduct instead of being notoriously wicked, was generally inoffensive and amiable. I have still more reason to be convinced that *since* he professed the knowledge and love of Christ he never allowed himself in the practice of any thing that he apprehended to be contrary to the will of God. But he was, as all are, guilty before God. He felt and confessed himself to be a sinner. He humbled himself as such under the hand of God, and amidst his severe afflictions could say, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." Never perhaps was there in any known instance, except that of our Lord Jesus himself, a more striking example of submission than he afforded. But if sin where it had evidently so small a comparative influence, was justly attended with such a weight of woe, how heinous must it be universally in the sight of God, how malignant in its general consequences ! If judgement thus began with *him*, "what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God ? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the sinner and the ungodly appear ?"

A suitable improvement of this subject may lead us to a better conformity with the thoughts of God, in forming a comparative estimate of TIME and ETERNITY, of the present life and of that which is to come. "If in this life only," said the apostle Paul, with a view to the distresses

which he and other disciples of Jesus endured, "if in this life only we had hope, we should be of all men the most miserable." With what anguish of heart did our deceased friend write on his window shutter the day when he quitted this neighbourhood,

"Me miserable ! How could I escape  
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair,  
When death, earth, heaven, and all consign'd to ruin,  
Whose friend *was* God, but God swore not to aid me !"

The nature, the extremity, the duration of his sufferings, cannot be seriously revolved without awe and terror. The only effectual consolation to us is that, which in his experience, I doubt not, has already far exceeded the length and breadth, the height and depth of his sorrows—his entrance into the joy of our Lord. What is all that he endured for almost thirty years, what is all that can be endured throughout the utmost extent of mortality, compared with that "Rest which remaineth for the people of God" ? No affliction is joyous ; our natures even innocently recoil from suffering, as the humanity of Jesus did. This life in itself, is of no small importance to such beings as we are ; and when lingered out in pain and distress, it is a severe trial to our faith. But we see by the common afflictions of believers, and still more by such an example as this set before us, how small an account the Eternal makes of temporal sufferings, compared with everlasting blessedness and glory. Let *his* thoughts become our thoughts. The age of Methuselah if spent in unintermitted misery on earth, would be compensated a thousand, and ten thousand times ten thousand in heaven ; yet without the smallest approach to a termination of its enjoyments. On the other hand, my friends, consider what is the utmost extent of worldly pleasures, riches or grandeur, that can be possessed in this short life, compared with the worm that never dieth, the fire that is never quenched, the smoke of whose torment ascendeth for ever ? Oh, flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold for hope on the refuge set before you in the Gospel ! It brings life and immortality to light, by the revelation of Jesus Christ, as the author of eternal salvation to all who put their trust in him. Choose as Moses did, "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ" above the greatest earthly riches, and having a just "respect to the recompense of the reward."

That our *Conduct* also, may be better conformed to the *ways of God*, let us derive some important *practical* lessons from the subject which has engaged our attention.

HUMILITY, CONTENTMENT, and THANKFULNESS, which though distinct seem to be inseparable, are dispositions forcibly inculcated by the consideration of our departed friend's experience. How few among mankind have ever attained to the same eminence and excellence as he did ; yet with all his natural, his acquired, his moral and spiritual endowments, how hopeless, how comfortless was his condition ! Lord ! what is man ? At his best estate altogether vanity. Christians !

have you spiritual comfort, have you distinguished talents, have you an unblemished and honourable character? Remember Cowper, and "put your hands upon your mouths, and your mouths in the dust before God." "Let no flesh glory in his presence; but, as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Beware of placing the slightest reliance upon your past or present attainments, or of cherishing a spark of pride on the account. In an instant, the Lord can turn your boasting into shame; and he will do so rather than suffer his glory or your salvation to be impeded. It is "He that worketh in you to to will and to perform, therefore work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Never forget that your acceptance depends only upon the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, and your spiritual preservation and growth in grace, upon the constant operation of the Holy Spirit. So far as these grounds of dependence are rejected or slighted, your ways become opposed to those of God, and therefore cannot prosper. With humiliation before God, *Contentment* under his dispensations is closely connected. You forget the evil of sin, or you have never been convinced of it, if you are murmuring against God, whatever situation you are in. If tempted to repine at poverty, bad health, unkindness or injuries from others, and the lowness or instability of your spiritual comfort; recollect the state of our deceased neighbour, and compare your conduct and your trials with his. Would any of you exchange your afflictions for what he suffered? Reluctant as every one is to bear his own peculiar cross, and prone to wish for that of another in its stead, I hardly think that any of you, after the detail that has been given of Mr. Cowper's miseries, will presume to say that your trials are to be compared with his. If they were you would not have been present on this occasion. He never dared to enter a place of worship. When invited to do so he has said "Had I the universe I would give it to go with you; but I dare not do it against the will of God." This was evidently delusion and derangement. The Scriptures exhort us, on no account to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Bless God that you have the capacity of obeying this exhortation. On every ground the consideration of his state calls you to *thankfulness*; but above all, that you have any hope however low and weak, of final deliverance, resting upon that foundation which God has laid in the Gospel. This alone renders the comforts of life truly sweet, and makes even its trials acceptable. It is that blessing which may be retained, and will be found sufficient, when all others take their flight; but like every mercy we enjoy, its full value is probably never felt till it is taken from us. Our late friend in his poem on Hope, thus addresses himself to that unspeakable gift and work of God,

"Hope! let the wretch once conscious of the joy,  
Whom now despairing agonies destroy,  
Speak,— for he can, and none so well as he,  
What treasures centre, what delights in thee!  
Had he the gems, the spices, and the land  
That boasts the treasure, all at his command;  
The fragrant grove, th' inestimable mine,  
Were light when weighed against one smile of thine."

have you this hope in lively exercise? Then you cannot be but thankful and joyful. Are you mourning for its feebleness? Bless the God of all grace, for what you have; and clasp it to your heart, determined in the strength which Christ imparts never to resign it to the world or Satan. The way to preserve what you have, is to be thankful. Every day, every hour of reason and peace, every glimmering ray of hope and comfort, is enhanced in its value by a serious reflection upon the distresses which our dear friend so long endured, Can you find relief from the sorrows of the day in tranquil repose? Be increasingly thankful from the recollection of what wearisome nights were appointed to him. Innumerable times was he constrained to cry out, "Would to God it were morning!" Never surely in the lips of a fellow creature, could that exclamation be more appropriate, "Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!"

But amidst so numerous a congregation as that assembled on the present occasion, I fear I am addressing some whose case is exactly the reverse of Mr. Cowper's. He had reason to rejoice in hope though he was deaf to the voice of consolation. Are there none of you who have cause to tremble, as Felix did at the prospect of eternal judgement, who yet have hitherto been deaf to alarm and admonition? you can transact your business, enjoy your comforts and amusements, nay indulge in sinful practises and pursuits; as if there was neither heaven nor hell, as if the word of God had not declared that except you repent and be converted you must perish for ever. Far better was it for our deceased neighbour, through so great tribulation to enter into Glory, than for you, with stupidity and hardness of heart, to hasten every moment toward everlasting perdition. Why should you be more at ease than he was; or why so much as he? If the mere thought of damnation was such a terror to his mind, what should the actual approach of it be to yours? As yet, the long suffering of God has been wonderfully extended to you. May you improve it to your Salvation; lest there be indeed nothing left for you, but a fearful looking for of judgement, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries of God! Your privileges in this town are great. To whatever place of worship you go the law of God is preached to you in its spirituality, the Gospel of Christ in its freedom and fulness of Grace. Your future misery will be dreadfully aggravated by these mercies, if you hearken not to the gracious exhortation with which the prophet introduces the words of our text; "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

While every individual, in every situation, is loudly called to gratitude and praise by the subject before us, it no less points out the necessity of UNCEASING PRAYER. The duty of thus acknowledging the Lord in all our ways, is easy to be demonstrated. The privilege of casting all our care on Him who careth for us, is inestimable. The methods in which our Lord and his disciples enforce the universal and continual practise of prayer are various, numerous and striking.

In tracing back the Lord's conduct towards us during our past lives, we may derive from every part of it powerful motives to pray without ceasing." But nothing may tend more forcibly to impress the mind with the importance of perseverance in prayer, than a serious observation of our late friend's experience. Those of you who know what it is to pray with the spirit and with the understanding, need not to be informed of the difficulties that occur in fulfilling our Lord's injunction to "pray always, and never to faint." The delay of answers to your requests, the occasional depression of your minds, the violence of temptation, the prevalence of unbelief, the burden and perplexity of your outward or inward distresses, your insensibility toward invisible though eternal objects, and your conviction of the past abuse of mercy, concur to induce you at times to restrain prayer before God. When distresses have forced you to the throne of Grace, you have indeed found that access to it which our atoning high priest has opened with his own blood, an unspeakable and invaluable relief: and when your affections have been strongly impressed with spiritual and divine objects, prayer has been not only easy but delightful. Frequently however, perhaps commonly it has been the reverse; and shame or despondency has led you to conclude, that it would be better for you, or at least it could not be worse, if you ceased to call upon God. How fatal to many, how pernicious to all, is such a delusion! How dreadful were its effects upon our lamented friend! I cannot apprehend that it would have been possible for him to have languished so many years in mental misery and to have died without the restoration of spiritual comfort, if the devices of Satan had not deterred him from prayer. God has promised every blessing in answer to your requests, but none without them. While prayer is kept up, however feebly, there is hope for the future; as while the body breathes there may be continuance and restoration. A person, well known to some of you, and well acquainted with the state of our deceased neighbour, whose experience somewhat resembled her's, once told me that she believed nothing would have induced her to persist in waiting upon God, but the state in which Mr. Cowper remained after ceasing to do so. At that time his cup of affliction was not nearly filled. Are you able to drink it to the dregs? Are you willing to endure unutterable despair to the end of life? If not "pray without ceasing!" Pray at the worst of times! Surely it will augment the joys of our departed friend in a state of Glory, to know that the example of his past miseries prompts you to perseverance in prayer.

Another lesson of the utmost importance, is to be deduced from this interesting subject:—TO ADHERE TO THE REVEALED WORD OF GOD, *as your ground of hope and rule of conduct.* This is the standard by which alone we have to try our sentiments, our feelings, and our actions; but alas, how defective is the use we make of this invaluable gift! Who is there that does not discover a disposition to leave out a part of God's word, rather than discard such habits of opinion, experience, or practise as cannot be reconciled to this unerring guide? Some there are, who while they profess to believe the scriptures, renounce the blood of Christ as the ground of pardon, and the work of

the Eternal Spirit as the source of holiness. While they subvert the foundation, others unhappily demolish the superstructure of Christianity. Speculating upon the secret decrees of eternal Wisdom, which belong to God alone, they reject both the injunctions of the law and the invitations of the Gospel, which he has vouchsafed to divulge for our profit. Without these means, which the Lord has provided and prescribed for the healing of the nations, what can sinners do but wax worse and worse, till the measure of their iniquity is completed? While you guard against errors so destructive in their tendency, remember that in whatever manner you decline from the revealed will of God as your support and guide through life, and whatever you may substitute in its stead, it must in its degree be detrimental to your spiritual welfare. The snare of which I apprehend you are chiefly in danger, is the same which the experience of our deceased friend most solemnly warns us against; that of adopting your religious feelings as your ground of hope and rule of conduct. To this temptation, the constitution and habit of Mr. Cowper's mind peculiarly exposed him; but in a greater or smaller measure it is common to pious people, and I doubt not it has been severely felt by some of you. They who are liable to have their minds the most sensibly affected with religious impressions, should the more carefully guard against substituting them in the place of God's revealed word. Our lamented friend had long and eminently enjoyed the love of Christ shed abroad in his heart. His spiritual triumph and rejoicing had been unusually great. His distress and terror, that succeeded these enjoyments, were proportionately aggravated. So deplorable an alteration, in himself, led him to suppose that an equal change had taken place in the mind of God; and that after having admitted him to a foretaste of heaven, he had doomed him to endless misery. Alas, how had he forgotten the delightful theme of his brighter hours!

"There is a fountain fill'd with blood  
 Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;  
 And sinners plung'd beneath that flood,  
 Lose all their guilty stains,  
 Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood  
 Shall never lose its pow'r  
 Till all the ransomed church of God  
 Be sav'd to sin no more,"

Ought we to conclude, when we lose our comforts that Christ has therefore lost his power to save? Was it for *these* that we were accepted of God? If not, why must we be rejected when they are removed? "Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. He is the same, yesterday, today, and for ever. Him that cometh unto him, He will in no wise cast out." When, therefore you can derive neither comfort nor hope from your present feelings, and when all past enjoyment only enhances your present distress, recollect that the promises of God in Christ can suffer no change; that his power and grace are susceptible of no decay; that to be deterred by your changeable feelings from seeking and trusting in Christ, is to place them in the room of his

revealed word; and that it was time for the Lord to withdraw your religious comfort, when you are resting on *that*, instead of his infallible promise. "You would but ill have enjoyed," says a sensible foreign writer, "that which you knew not how to part with."

The strange persuasion, which I have already said our late friend entertained, that it was his duty to deprive himself of life, arose from this error, of substituting his feelings for the word of God. As I fear that similar temptations may not be uncommon to minds whose natural melancholy affects their religious experience, I think it my duty to be explicit on this subject. I have argued with him on the impossibility that God should command him to transgress his own law; and he supported his opinion by this plea, that the force with which the impression of such a duty had been made upon his mind, was equal to that of any he had received from the truths of Scripture. He alleged in his vindication, the example of Abraham, who hesitated not to put to death his beloved and only Son, at the command of God; and judging himself called in like manner to perform an extraordinary act of faith, he concluded that his failure was therefore an unparalleled offence, beyond the reach of pardon. Beware lest any of you misapply the history of Abraham, through forgetfulness that you are under a dispensation very different from that of the patriarchal age. Before the Lord vouchsafed a written record of his will, he doubtless distinguished with infallible certainty, the immediate revelations which he imparted to chosen persons. However inconsistent the promise and the command that were given to Abraham must have appeared, he knew, beyond a possibility of doubt, that both came from God. But if your minds are at different times strongly impressed with opposite purposes, how are you to distinguish that which is agreeable to the will of God? Doubtless, by referring all to the standard of his unerring and unchanging word. So the prophet Isaiah directs, "to the law and the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Thus try the spirits and the doctrines of preachers; "prove all things, hold fast that which is good, and abstain from that which appears to be evil." To this test bring your religious feelings; looking to the sure word of inspiration, as to a light shining amidst darkness. With this "sword of the Spirit," oppose your spiritual enemies; replying to every suggestion of Satan, after our Lord's pattern, "It is written." Only thus can *your* ways and thoughts be assimilated to the ways and thoughts of God.

I cannot close this discourse without remarking that our time has been employed and our attention engaged on the present occasion in a very unusual manner. Never before from this pulpit or from any in this town have you probably heard so much spoken of a *fellow creature*. The circumstances described and the degree in which they have interested our minds, however remarkable, would not in my judgement vindicate the employment of an hour devoted to Christian Worship, merely to contemplate the character of a mortal like ourselves. But I trust that our subject at this time is eminently adapted to lead us to the LAMB OF GOD *that taketh away the sin of the world*. Only through the efficacy

of His precious blood to atone for guilt, did our late excellent neighbour ever cherish a hope of Salvation. Upon this ground alone we build our confidence that he is now exalted to a state of happiness and glory. You have seen that a life of faith in Jesus Christ, as able and willing to deliver you from all evil, is the only way of peace and joy upon earth. You have seen the danger of relying in any measure upon the comfort you have already enjoyed in his service, instead of trusting in Him who is the inexhaustible source of consolation. You have seen an astonishing instance of the unchangeable love of Christ to his people in the preservation of our dear deceased friend, through trials more dreadful than the heated furnace of the Chaldean monarch; and in his peaceful dismission after so many years of misery to a world "where sorrow is unknown." We have heard the voice of our High-priest reprove the accuser of his people; "The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee! Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

In touching upon some of the excellencies of our late amiable friend's disposition and conduct, which endeared him, I believe without a single exception, to every one who knew him, I have been often reminded of *Him* to whose image all whom God foreknew as heirs of eternal life He predestinated to be conformed. To avoid breaking the connection and increasing the extent of this discourse, which is at present greater than I wished it to be, I have omitted to trace step by step this pleasing and profitable resemblance. But I hope that you will supply this deficiency by availing yourselves of so blameless and beautiful a pattern as that which you know was exhibited in our beloved neighbour, to enhance your admiration of that matchless excellence which shone forth in the human character of Jesus; in comparison with whom,

"All things below that charm our sight  
Are shadows, tipt with glow-worm light."

The resemblance of the brightest Christian to his Lord and Saviour can at the utmost rise no higher than that of the moon's pale lustre to the dazzling splendour of the sun, from which its existence is derived. "Whatsoever things are true, or venerable, or just, or pure, or lovely, or of good report, every virtue and every praise," have their perfection and their source in the Son of God; to imitate whom, and to receive out of his fullness, is the highest happiness and honour of his disciples. Others we are to follow only as they follow Christ. But "those things which ye have learned and received, and heard and seen," in our excellent neighbour, in which he closely copied the heavenly pattern, "think of and practice those things; and the God of peace shall be with you."

Your eyes have been suffused with tears that expressed the sympathy of your hearts with the peculiar sufferings of our deceased friend. Have not these led you to recollect and to be affected with the sufferings of Jesus? Like Job, our beloved neighbour suffered, not as a malefactor nor an atrocious sinner, but according to the will of God. His course, now finished, affords indeed an important sequel to the

history of Job, as it demonstrates that a believer may not only live, but also die under the pressure of severe affliction. But both were justly liable to suffer, as partakers of the guilt and depravity from which none of the race of Adam is exempt. Jesus alone suffered without sin; not merely as an example, though as the brightest example of suffering, meekness, and patience; but as the only atonement that could be made for us. "He bore our sins in his own body on the cross; for our transgressions he was wounded, and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." That we may "run with patience the course that is before us," of trial and affliction, let us "look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, disregarding the shame."

Finally, remember, amidst the difficulties and distresses that we may be called either ourselves to suffer or to see others endure, all is in the hand of Jesus, as "the Mediator between God and men, who gave himself a ransom for all." All power is committed to him in heaven and on earth. Satan by harassing and tempting the Disciples of Christ and the men of the world by resisting or persecuting them, can only accomplish the purposes, and advance the kingdom of our Redeemer. His ways and thoughts are above ours, certainly therefore above those of our enemies, as the heavens are above the earth. Let it be our concern to profit from the present meditation, by bringing our thoughts and our ways into a proper subjection and conformity to His. Let us "follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promises?" and ere long we shall join the heavenly choir, singing, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!"



## COWPER MEMORIAL CHURCH, OLNEY.

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What we are endeavouring to raise at Olney is a COWPER CONGREGATIONAL MEMORIAL CHURCH, at a cost (including new Schools and purchase of house property) of about £4,000. Upwards of £1,000 of this sum has already been secured in promises and reasonable expectations, but few outside the immediate neighbourhood of the poet have as yet contributed, but we cannot believe that it is only around Cowper's doors where he is known and admired. There must be thousands in this Country alone, willing to do something towards the purchase of his memorial when honestly and openly solicited.

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